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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 005887

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: ASAD DELIVERS HARD-LINE SPEECH, PREPARING SYRIANS FOR THE WORST

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche, per 1.4 b,d.

1. (C) Summary: Syrian President Bashar al-Asad gave a strident speech at Damascus University today (November 10). While Asad did not completely close the door on further cooperation with UNIIIC head Detlev Mehlis, he indicated that Syria had little faith in the fairness of the process and noted that future cooperation would be guided by Syrian national interests, so as to protect "national stability." He pointed to several recent offers of SARG cooperation with UNIIIC head Detlev Mehlis that he said had been rejected. The tone of the speech seemed designed to legitimize an anticipated rupture with the international community over further cooperation with the UN investigation and to prepare the Syrian public for the prospect of deeper isolation and eventual international sanctions. End Summary.

2. (SBU) In his 90-minute speech, combining strident language with a relatively diffident delivery, Asad insisted that Syria had continually cooperated in the past, whether on UNSCR 1559, the Fitzgerald investigation, or with Mehlis and UNSCR 1595. Nonetheless, the UNSC had passed resolution 1636 and accused Syria of not cooperating. Bashar said Syria would continue to "play along" and "cooperate" because it is innocent of the crime of killing Hariri and is respectful of "international legitimacy."

3. (SBU) However, Asad pointed out several general limits to that cooperation: Syria will not allow the process to disturb national stability or cause the sacrifice of national interests. He noted that the investigation needed to be conducted within the framework of reaching the facts about the crime. (Note: Asad also seemed to contradict his offer of cooperation, Bashar noting that "small tactics are no longer useful these days. We should hold our ground from the start, and eventually we will prevail. . . in the interest of the country.")

4. (C) Even in the context of accepting the principle of further cooperation, Bashar used language of defiance and attempted to fuel popular suspicions about the fairness and transparency of the investigation. He noted that when people are attacked by criminals, they must resist, adding that "we will not allow anyone to enter our house and tamper with our national stability." He also noted that Syria has two options: resistance or chaos, and noted that resistance is the cheaper price to pay. At several points Bashar pointed to the threat of chaos, often using Iraq to warn that such chaos could come to Syria if "superpowers" and their agents in Lebanon and elsewhere are allowed to have their way. He insisted that the outcome of the investigation of the Hariri assassination was pre-determined outcomes and was but one step in a series of developments controlled by "superpowers" to target Syria and "redraw the map" of the Middle East. Repeatedly Bashar indicated that Israel is the beneficiary of such developments. He also noted that Syria faces an "imminent danger" and maintained that Syria was a small country being forced to pay the price for the mistakes and conflicts of foreign powers.

5. (C) On the specifics of further cooperation, he claimed that Syria has offered several possibilities to Mehlis, including inviting Mehlis to come to Syria to meet with the Foreign Minister and separately with the head of the Syrian Investigative Commission, and offered the possibility of Mehlis holding meetings at any UN office in Damascus. In addition, after meeting with Arab League SYG Amre Moussa, and consulting by phone November 10 with Egyptian President Mubarak, he said that Syria had offered Mehlis the option of conducting his investigation at AL offices in Cairo. Mehlis had rejected all these options, said Bashar.

6. (C) In his introduction, Bashar noted that Syria has entered a difficult political stage, similar to the period in the 1980's. He noted that Syria was paying the price for its long-standing support for the Lebanese resistance, for the Palestinian Intifada, and for its opposition to the occupation of Iraq. Bashar laid out the familiar positions on SARG willingness to cooperate on Iraq-related issues, its support for Abu Mazen, and its withdrawal from Lebanon of its military forces, in compliance with UNSCR 1559.

7. (C) He was especially harsh about political developments

in Lebanon. He distinguished between the Lebanese people, who he said stood with Syria in support of the Lebanese resistance (Hizballah) and against conspiracies against Syria, and professional politicians and media interests who were serving foreign interests in targeting Syria. Bashar accused Lebanese PM Siniora of being "the servant of a servant" (presumably referring to Sa'ad al-Hariri). Before a brief conclusion, Asad launched a harsh attack against certain elements in the Arab media that were serving the interests of foreign powers.

Seche